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Perceptions of the existence and causes of structural violence in Ogoni communities, Nigeria

Abstract: This article explores the perceptions of Ogoni people about the existence and causes of structural violence in their communities. It relies heavily on qualitative data collected from five oil-rich and three oil-poor Ogoni communities, between February and May 2014, during which 200 open-ended survey questionnaires were administered and 189 were returned. Three focus group discussions and 69 key informant interviews were also conducted. The findings of the article are that structural violence can be found in Ogoniland; it is manifested in both visible and invisible forms; it is blamed by elites on exogenous factors, but by the disadvantaged on both exogenous and endogenous factors; and it will only be eliminated by reducing inequality and increasing democratisation.

Keywords: Structural violence; endogenous; exogenous; visible and invisible forms of violence

1. Introduction

Since over five decades efforts at bringing peace and development to Ogoniland have not yielded the desired results, this study examines the perceptions of the Ogoni people in both oil rich and oil poor communities about the existence and causes of persistent structural violence in their communities in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. The study employs both secondary and primary data. The secondary data, which originate from documentary and literature sources, are used in Section 2 to explore the concept of structural violence and in Section 3 to explain the condition of Ogoni communities. The results of the primary data, which originate from extensive fieldwork in eight Ogoni communities, are presented in Section 4, and Section 5 discusses these results. Section 6 concludes that structural violence does occur in both oil rich and oil poor communities in Ogoniland and for peace and development, ways must be found to eliminate it.

2. The concept of structural violence

Structural violence refers to the social machinery of oppression: “arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization...they are violent because they cause injury to people” (Farmers et al, 2006, p.1). It is a form of injustice built into social structures which harms their members and prevents them from meeting their needs (Galtung, 1969). For Kohler and Alcock (1976), structural violence is any social structure that cause death, pain, or harm to the people it is meant to protect. For Galtung, such a social structure causes both physical and emotional damage: “a violence structure leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and the spirit” (Galtung, 1990, p. 294). For example, it physically kills its subjects during wars which arise from social oppression and reprisal, and it emotionally kills them in the form of deprivation of human needs and freedom

and infliction of misery (Galtung, 1990). While scholars may argue that “insults, deprivation of human needs and misery” are not really violence, Galtung (1990, p.293) explains that “to the victims...it may mean slow but intentional killing”. Structural violence may be insidious and clever, often subtly normalizing social injustice. It:

“erases the history and consciousness of the social origins of poverty, sickness, hunger, and premature death, so that they are simply taken for granted and naturalised so that no one is held accountable except, perhaps, the poor themselves...Structural violence is violence that is permissible, even encouraged. Indeed most everyday violent acts are not seen as such, and are condoned, mis-recognised, and deemed as necessary to the maintenance of crucial cultural, social and political institutions” (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, p.14)

The concept of structural violence demonstrates how structural arrangements restrain individual agency to the point of infringing human rights (Ho, 2007). There are many different causes and manifestations of structural violence. For example gun violence in the United States is structural violence because it not only infringes the rights of individual members of minority groups, but it also causes trauma, pain and poverty for the family of gun victims (Tanya *et al* 2017). Unequal access to resources, power, health, and education are also common manifestations of structural violence (Farmer et al, 2006). A recent study of the Tonga minority ethnic group in Zimbabwe traced the source of their chronic poverty and disability to their social structures, which excludes the very poor from contributing to decisions that affect them. For example, Muderedzi (2017, p. 6) reports “that disabled children who were attending school in the district were illiterates because of lack of special needs schools and teachers. As a result, there was no child who managed to finish primary school education”, hence the Tongas maintained a cycle of poverty. Shaw (2012, p.168) argues that almost every community in Africa suffers from structural violence because so many people “are still wallowing in life-threatening poverty, facing low life expectancy, social exclusion, ill health, illiteracy, dependency and effective enslavement”. In other words, it is claimed that these communities experience severe ‘needs-deficit’, a trauma caused by structural violence, a “feeling of hopelessness, deprivation/frustration syndrome that shows up on the inside as self-directed aggression and on the outside as apathy and withdrawal” (Galtung, 1990, p.5).

There is a distinction to be drawn between visible and invisible manifestations of structural violence: visible manifestations are obvious and include acute poverty; whereas invisible manifestations are more implicit and include insidious discrimination. There is also a distinction to be drawn between exogenous and endogenous causes of structural violence: exogenous causes come from outside the community, whereas endogenous causes come from inside the community. Applying this latter distinction to Africa, we find that many writers hold that the root causes of structural violence in African communities are largely imported and therefore exogenous. Calderisi (2006) notes that although occasionally some Africans blame their own cultures, they have not stopped mentioning the ‘West’ as the primary cause of their problems. For example, Asafa (2015) listed colonial capitalism, terrorism and racism

as the triple causes of structural violence in African communities. Casey-Hayford, cited in Rodney (1973, p.51), claimed that before the arrival of Europeans, African communities were not structurally violent but peaceful: “before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people, having our own institutions, having our own ideas of government”. For instance, before the 1914 British amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorate which gave birth to Nigeria, the Hausa societies maintained centralised local systems of government and were peaceful despite the invasion of the Fulanis (Sampson, 2014). Likewise the Yoruba and the Igbos had their own settled self-governing structures (Sampson, 2014; Rodney, 1973).

For such writers, the enduring virtues of these traditional institutions include claims that they exemplified quality leadership because they were custodians of indigenous knowledge (Dinbaba, 2014; Kendie and Guri nd); they were communal in that their members shared a strong sense of community (Kangalawe et al, 2014); they preached the principles of equality and participation (Dawari and Omotola 2010); and they brought stability because they remained when exogenous organizations faded away (Kendie and Guri, nd, Kangalawe et al, 2014). On this view, traditional African communities were harmonious organisms:

“In traditional African society the sacred and the secular are inseparable. There is no compartmentalization of life. All the various aspects of humans’ life are interwoven. What religion forbids or condemns, the society also forbids and condemns, and similarly society approves those things which religion approves or and sanctions” (Nwafor, 2013, p.127).

But, the argument runs, Europeans turned these peaceful self-governing structures into violent structures through the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism, restructuring Africa for their own economic gain (Rodney, 1973; Shaw, 2012). For example, Kanyinke (2010) claimed that exogenous institutions in East African communities in Kenya have not improved the well-being of local communities, but instead have sown seeds of conflict by dividing community members into traditional and western groups. Likewise, Yamia et al (2009) argued that their study of Sub-Saharan African communities revealed that indigenous institutions were sound and peaceful when compared with the exogenous institutions that replaced them. According to Taylor, capitalist organizations were the agents of structural violence, since they caused “uneven development which manifests in extreme inequality between social classes” (cited in Arisukwu and Nnaomah 2010, p.139). Clempson, 2012, p. 2) claims that at the global level there was a general belief among development theorists that “international institutions, powerful states and transnational corporations” were important causes of structural violence in Africa (see also Shaw, 2012). Such external institutions were structured around neo-liberal principles and were causes of structural violence because these values were not consistent with the culture of their host communities (Mpofu, 2012, p.1; Benneth and Dearden, 2014). Iwara (2010) cautioned about the dangers of following exogenous prescriptions of development which undermined indigenous institutions, since these traditional institutions had been tested and tried over long periods of time (see also Lule, 1995).

Rodney (1973) argued that African communities could be equitable again if they break from the capitalist system (see also Tikly, 2004). Kendie and Guri (nd,) advocated the preservation and promotion of indigenous traditional institutions like clan, kingship, and *nnoboa* (community self-help) where they still existed in this post-colonial era, because they served their people well before the European colonisation of Africa, and they have been in the business of community governance and community development (CD) since pre-colonial times. Currently, the majority of people (who live in rural areas) were still organized around this indigenous type of non-violent organization (Kendie and Guri, nd, p.1 and Onyeozu, 2010).

However, in opposition to this sustained attack on exogenous forces for introducing structural violence to previously peaceful traditional African communities, other writers blamed traditional institutions (i.e. endogenous factors) for the structural violence that exists in contemporary African communities. For example, Platteau and Abraham (2002, p. 114) traced structural violence in Africa mainly to the paternalistic culture on which African communities and their indigenous institutions were framed, since their leadership:

“provides an authority structure which imposes its rule or its interpretation of the tradition on the lower people who have no choice but to comply. The latter do not dare speak out their possible disagreement and, out of fear of retribution, they may just pay lip service to decisions or rules which they do not like”.

According to this interpretation, African institutions were seen as constituting a primitive and limiting structure which “divests African thinking of any inner impulse to liberate itself from irrationality, myths and obsolete habits” (Kebede, 1999, p.2). This school of thought claims that Africans maintained and nourished structural violence in their thoughts, persistently clinging on to their traditional institutions (Kebede, 1999). Calderisi, in his work, *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid isn't Working*, claimed that the major cause of structural violence in African communities lay in the very heart of African institutions and not to exogenous influence, pointing out that “Africa has been making its own history since independence and has been largely free of foreign domination since the end of the cold war” (Calderisi, 2006, p.3; see also Collier and Gunning, 1999), yet it has been plagued by structural violence throughout its post-colonial history. Calderisi (2006) argues that indigenous African institutions were built on their own oppressive values and cultures.

We should note that for yet other writers, both exogenous and endogenous factors are to blame for structural violence. For example, Emeh (2013) cites Nnadozie who argued that structural violence in Africa was due to the conjunction of endogenous and exogenous elites: the two sets of actors interacted and reinforced each other (see also Clempson, 2012; Ikejiaku, 2009). We should also note that proponents of the view that structural violence was due to endogenous factors argue that the way to remove it was by restructuring indigenous/traditional institutions (Platteau and Abraham, 2002; Okeke-Ogbuafor et al,

2016a) through policies of equality and processes of democratisation - the same prescriptions which are offered by proponents of the view that exogenous factors were to blame for structural violence.

3. The conditions of Ogoni communities

Ogoniland is a kingdom in the Rivers state, one of Nigeria's nine Niger Delta (ND) states. It is made up of four local government areas – Khana, Gokana, Eleme and Tai - which together cover an area of about 1,000 km, with a total population of 832,000 in 2006 (UNEP, 2011). Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in this area during the mid-1950s. UNEP (2011) recorded that Ogoni communities host 12 oilfields, 116 drilled wells, 89 completed wells and 5 flow stations each with a capacity of 185,000 barrels per day. Pyagbara (2007) noted that these were all Shell facilities because Shell was the only multinational oil company with an Oil Mining Licence for the whole of Ogoniland. From the beginning of oil capitalism in the 1950s to 1993, the year Shell moved out of Ogoni, Detheridge (cited in Boele *et al*, 2001) pointed out that the 634 million barrels of oil produced in this kingdom added about US\$5.2 billion in revenue to the Nigerian national budget.

The Nigerian government has for over five decades intervened to bring peace and improve the life of the Ogonis, but these efforts have yet to yield the desired results (Tobor, 2016; Onuoha, 2016; Odubo and Tobor, 2016; Odalonu, 2015; Oladele and Austen, 2015). Often these interventions trigger conflicts which disturb the limited peace that communities enjoy. For example, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), created to restore peace and bring development, has been described as a source of conflict because aggrieved community members especially militants groups, who felt their communities were disenfranchised from NDDC projects, doubled their attack on the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies, thereby causing more mayhem in their already fragile communities (Aghalino, nd; Rexler, 2010).

The UNDP Niger Delta Human Development report (2006, p.2), described Ogoni communities as home to one of the world's poorest populations: it is “a place of frustrated expectations and deep-rooted mistrust. Unprecedented restiveness at times erupts in violence” (see also Paki and Ebienfa, 2011). Even though there are no current official statistics that record the rate and depth of poverty in Ogoniland (Oluwaseun, 2016), writers say things are not getting any better for the majority of Ogonis (Okeke-Ogbuafor et al, 2016b; Gonzalez and Derudder, 2016; Oluwaseun, 2016). In other words, the living condition of the Ogonis may now have fallen below the level described in 2009, where the majority live on less than US\$1 per day (Ikejiaku, 2009). Oluwaseun (2016, p. 174), reports that the average Ogoni indigene is forced by circumstances to ‘feed from hand to mouth’ and send her children to poorly managed government schools (see also Okeke-Ogbuafor et al, 2016b). According to commentators, Ogonis had lost control over their environment (Ikerionwu, 2013) and their lives (Akinbobola and Njori, 2014). Community chiefs and other members of a small elite dominate marginalized poor community members (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2016a; Nwankwo, 2015).

Ogonis fell mostly within the helpless and militant groups (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2016b; Oluwaseun, 2016; Asuni, 2009; Kiale, 2011; Arisuokwu and Nnaomah, 2012). The helpless category was the worst hit when there were threats like “health, economic down turns and even man-made violence” (Rayhan and Philip, 2004, p.ii). The militant category, according to Oluwaniyi (2010), was made up of youths who had graduated from being members of their communities’ indigenous youth organizations to becoming dangerous firebrands. This set of community members was mostly made up of young, single and unemployed males who felt economically powerless following the destruction of their environment and the marginalization they faced at the hands of national and local community elites (Asuni, 2009). Such marginalization and disempowerment provoked “deep rooted frustration” which explained the spread of violence across their communities (Paki and Ebienfa, 2011, p.141). While some members of this group were criminally or politically motivated for selfish reasons, according to Asuni (2009, p.3), others were “ideologically driven”. Kiale (2011) noted that Ogoni communities were home to some of the deadliest grassroots cult groups in Nigeria. The activities of militants and cultists in Ogoniland account for the loss of lives and increases in the level of poverty and community underdevelopment (Kiale, 2011). For example, the Kpong community witnessed five months of conflict in 2007 (April-September), while Zaakpon suffered the same fate for four years (2003-2007) with over 30 deaths, destruction of property and the displacement of community members (Kiale, 2011). Gonzalez and Derudder (2016), notes that Ogoni and the entire Niger Delta remains a very volatile region.

Many scholars blamed this parlous condition of Ogonis mostly on Shell, arguing that its capitalist intrusion led to inequitable policies imposed by the Nigerian government on Ogonis; the destruction of the Ogoni environment by Shell; and a culture of corruption among Ogoni elites (Okoh 2005; Nbeta 2012; Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2017c). Pyagbara (2007) asserted that Shell’s oil business not only caused poverty but also disfigured Ogoniland’s once-communal indigenous institutions/ organizations, and as a result, these institutions/organizations, which were previously peaceful structures, themselves became sources of further structural violence (Nweke, 2014; Igbara and Keenam, 2013). However, other writers argued that indigenous institutions, and in fact their entire host communities, had always been sources of structural violence, and oil capitalism had only made it worse (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2016a). Platteau and Abraham (2002) asserted that community imperfections did not begin with capitalist intrusion, though they may have been exacerbated by it. However, although they disagreed about its cause, all these writers agreed on the fact that there is structural violence in Ogoniland. Indeed as noted by Dilts *et al* (2012, p.1): “if we...limit ourselves to an analytics of violence that points solely to agents and intentions, we are sure to miss the pervasive forms of violence that are built into structures, institutions, ideologies, and histories”. The current study seeks to investigate the perceptions of Ogonis about the existence and causes of structural violence in their communities.

4. Methods of collection and analysis of primary data

This study relied mainly on qualitative methods of primary data collection, consisting of open-ended survey questionnaires (SQs); focus group discussions (FGDs); and key informant interviews (KIs), in order to understand Ogoni's perceptions about structural violence in their communities. Alexander Jakob, cited in Yeasmin (2012, p.1), makes a case for such combining of different methods of data collection: by "multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single-observer, single-theory studies". Fieldwork was carried out between February and May 2014 in five oil-rich and three oil-poor communities. During this fieldwork, 200 SQs were administered by the researcher and an assistant. SQ respondents, most of whom had received a basic education and were mainly community leaders/elites, were recruited through snow-ball sampling based on their knowledge of the topic of study. It is important to state that participants were generally not familiar with the academic phrase 'structural violence', but they had a clear understanding of experiencing it. This is reflected in the pattern of responses received from the 189 SQs returned. These SQs provided both qualitative and quantitative data; mostly about the underlying causes; manifestations; and their experiences of structural violence. Marginalization, force, Shell, the government (Nigeria), poverty, conflicts, and helplessness, were repeated themes that SQ respondents identified as causes of their problems. The frequency of these themes was worked out in percentages using Microsoft Excel. To elaborate these themes, the three focus group discussions (FGDs) that were conducted sought participants' perception about them. For representativeness (to reduce bias), participants in the FGDs were recruited from their indigenous community-based organizations (CBOs) based on their knowledge and willingness to participate in this study. In Africa, membership of indigenous CBOs is regarded as important and in some case mandatory (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2016b; Green, 2010).

Lastly, 69 key informants (KIs), identified/or recommended during the course of administering the SQs and conducting FGDs, were interviewed. About 60% of these KIs were poor members of their community indigenous CBOs/institutions, and the remaining 40% were made up of Shell officials, community chiefs/ elites, community religious leaders, researchers from the University of Port Harcourt and non-Ogoni indigenes resident in Ogoniland. Like FGD participants, efforts were made to recruit KIs from their established indigenous CBOs (council of chiefs and elders; women; men and youth groups). Since these KIs were not familiar with the phrase 'structural violence', the interviewer's questions were mostly about the manifestations and underlying causes of structural violence. Owing to the flexibility of the semi-structured method of data collection, KIs comfortably expressed their thoughts by sometimes moving away from the researcher's questions to explain personal or general incidences that supported their claims. Some KIs took to narrating their own life experiences and telling stories that their fathers told them - i.e. using the past to explain present practices. As Creswell (1994) notes, this method of research leads to discovery because it not only explains events as they occur in their natural setting, but it also enables the researcher to interpret the significance of these events. To make further sense of these events, the researcher tested the data on manifestations and underlying causes of structural

violence as reported by participants against evidence of structural violence documented in the literature (Golquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007).

Comments in the open-ended survey questionnaires (SQs), and transcribed texts of FGDs and KIs were divided into themes, and into the contexts in which these themes were used. These data sets were analysed and the themes and their contexts were threaded together. Burnard et al (2008) describes the method of qualitative analysis used in this study as ‘thematic content analysis’.

5. Results and discussion of the primary data

Section 5 is divided into two parts – Ogonis’ perceptions of (1) the manifestations, and (2) the causes, of structural violence

5.1 Manifestations of structural violence in Ogoni communities

Findings from this study showed that community members experienced both visible and invisible forms of structural violence.

5.1.1 Visible structural violence

Almost all survey questionnaire respondents (SQs), focus group discussants (FGDs) and key informants (KIs) described the manifestation of visible structural violence. For them, common manifestations of structural violence were cashlessness, lack of basic infrastructure and escalation of physical conflict. For example, KI-3, a Councillor, said:

“we don’t have cash, there is so much poverty here. Our people are not educated not because they are not willing but because their parents are equally poor and not educated. Poverty is a cycle, if my parents were farmers and did not send me to school because all we do is to plant cassava, yam and cocoyam and then harvest to eat and not for sell... my own children will end up becoming low scale cassava and cocoyam farmers... this is our problem”

KI-20, a former councillor, described the manifestation of structural violence in their communities as mostly the lack of basic amenities *“the problem is that we do not have infrastructures...this is what our people are fighting for”*. FGD-1 said their communities had suffered instability: *“the issue is that there are so many reasons why we experience inter and intra community conflict. Youth restiveness is a common reason. In short the genesis is poverty and unemployment”*. KI-67 explained that in 2013, within his Gokana local government *“seven of our communities were warring”*.

5.1.2 Invisible structural violence

Nearly all SQs, FGDs and KIs described manifestations of invisible structural violence. These manifestations can be divided into three categories: social inequality; political exclusion; and community development.

Social inequality

Thirty one KIs and eight SQs held that their community and traditional institutions were deeply unequal because the poor and uneducated members were marginalised. KI-54, reported that within his indigenous CBO, it *“is big man talk to big man”* and a *“man who owns a big car will hardly become friends with someone that cannot afford a bicycle wheel... because the difference between them is wide”* (SQ-63). SQ-2 explained she was always overlooked in her organization: *“nobody sees you as a human being...the rich intimidate us”*. In fact, within indigenous organizations, the poor and uneducated were not only voiceless but *“feel socially excluded”* (SQ-79). Moreover, 21 participants internalised the treatment meted out to them by better placed members of their organizations. For example, KI-39 explained that he was unsure about his mental state and said *“am not reasonable”*, while KI-34 said *“I cannot talk when people are talking”*. KI-45 said she might possess qualities that caused her rejection because *“am not relevant to our people, and nobody even cares whether I come for meetings or not”*.

It is true that despite the indigent CBOs’ negative impacts on their well-being, many Ogonis had a strong attachment to their indigenous CBOs for their potential as ideal models for community enrichment. At the root of this aspirational attachment was the communitarian belief about community and citizenship as an ideal or ‘common good’, which was considered prior to individual self-interest. Indeed, an “individual’s sense of identity is produced only through relations with others in the community of which she or he is a part” (Gaventa, 2002, p.5; see also Kochalumchvvalti, 2010). Ogoni community chiefs/elites like KI-1 warned that for better or for worse, community members “must identify with their community” (Okeke-Ogbuafor et al 2016, p. 6). For example, membership of indigenous institutions, especially CBOs, was very important in Ogoniland, and, according to Green (2010), relinquishing membership of this organization disqualified an individual from being an indigene of the community. KI-27 reports that as the *“first form of identity in our community...If you decide to relinquish your membership that means you will be an outcast”*. But other Ogonis found these invisible coils of collectivism oppressive and were willing to risk abandonment by their community by leaving them. For example SQ-101 stated clearly that it was over between him and his organization: *“yes, I accept that I am an outcast, I belong to myself”*. KI-64 also stated that he no longer identified with his FTCBO, *“I don’t belong to any organization...you know I don’t have money and good clothes, they will not respect me.”*

Political exclusion

A study of the governing structures of African communities by Platteau and Abraham (2002, p.112) revealed that community leadership structures were often autocratic because of the traditional belief that the chief and his entourage “embodies the will of supernatural agencies

[the ancestors' souls] which are believed to govern every aspect of people's life". Ogonis still practised the traditional system of inherited leadership which many of them saw as sacred since it was inherited from their ancestors (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2016a). As a result, chieftaincy stools were respected and hardly contested because of the fear that *"if he [chief] is changed something bad will happen in the community, fear will not even allow people to question them"* (Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al*, 2016a, p. 60). According to 26 KIs, their chiefs appointed the leaders of their various CBOs, and, unsurprisingly, these appointed leaders together with their members did not *"confront their traditional leaders"*. KI-26, from an oil-rich community, confirmed that community youths were not given the opportunity to choose their own leader: *"he was appointed by the paramount ruler and they presented him before the youths"*. Likewise KI- 65, from an oil-poor community, said their youth and women leaders were imposed on them: *"our youth leader was not voted for, even our women leader...I went to the town square and heard my chief announcing to the women, the name of their new leader"*. KI-2 reported that the poor women in his community *"can explain why they don't want a particular candidate to be their leader but our leaders [chief] will not see any sense in what these women are saying. They see such talks as unreasonable argument, after all what does she know?"*

Under this traditional system of leadership, therefore, community members were not engaged in the management of their community. KI-28 asserted that the system lacked accountability: *"imagine you cannot question its authority except you are a politician"* (see Chigudu, 2015). KI-67 pointed out that *"our women are not normally involved in decision making, I mean women don't have a voice... these women cannot come and defend their own interest"*. It was likewise with the poor and uneducated. These respondents suffered invisible forms of structural violence because *"our chiefs do not listen to their voices"* (KI-16). Some of them feared to express their feelings: SQ-90 reported that they (the poor) kept to themselves because they did not want to get into trouble. KI-43 said *"I am a widow, if I talk and get into trouble nobody will help me"*. FG-1 noted that *"if you do not have money, you have to learn to shut up your mouth"*. In other words, this system of governance was not only exclusionary, it instilled fear in community members and as a result, restricted their freedom to make choices (Chigudu 2015 and Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al* 2016a; Platteau and Abraham, 2002;).

KI-3 traced conflicts in his community to its malformed community governance structure: *"honestly we do not have good forums, there has been chieftaincy tussles...and problems in almost all our communities"*. KI-63 recounted the physical and human casualties his community experienced - *"buildings were razed, lives were wasted"* - because corrupt chiefs bought cult boys to protect their thrones (KI-67; see also Arisuokwu and Nnaomah, 2012; Kiale, 2011). Not every community member was able to absorb the pain that came with such discrimination and lack of inclusion, and FGD-1 reported that sometimes they conquered their fears and manifested visible forms of structural violence by engaging in conflict: *"since we don't have what it takes to meet them [community chiefs/elites], we sometimes get violent...with the hope that things will get better. Our leaders misrepresent us, they don't always tell the truth, they lie, they tell people we are happy and enjoying"* (see Asuni, 2009; Arisuokwu and Nnaomah, 2012; Mohammed, 2013; Zandvliet and Pedro, 2002). KI-19

confirmed that *“frustration is the ultimate cause of violence”*. Mohammed (2013, p. 239) asserted that *“indigenous leaders have helped incredibly in sustaining the sufferings of their communities”*.

Economic corruption

Traditionally, community leaders were charged with the responsibility of community development (Pyagbara, 2007; Onyeozu, 2010; Arisuokwu and Nnaomah, 2012). However, in Ogoniland, community chiefs and leaders of their indigenous organizations were accused of re-defining community development to mean self-enrichment because they partnered with Shell at the expense of their subjects (Pyagbara, 2007). According to Zandvliet and Pedro (2002) and Nweke (2012), this happened because Shell wooed these chiefs with cash. Shell has consistently denied that it bribed traditional chiefs/elites, insisting that it gave out cash to community leaders for community development. For example, KI-23, a social performance officer with Shell, claimed that the funds they sent into local communities were not bribes, because *“we work along Ogoni community structure. We have to hand over the money to their chiefs and leaders of their organizations. Imagine yearly we ask them to provide a business plan so that we can work hand in hand with them as part of our development plan. But you still see that these projects are hijacked by their community elites”*. KI-23 claimed that the structure of their communities allowed only members of the chiefs’ families and their elites to benefit from monies sent into their communities. For instance, poor residents did not have access to the scholarship programmes arranged by Shell: *“we only hear that Shell awards scholarship to our people. My children have not benefitted anything”* (KI-55). These respondents said they suffered emotional pain as a result of their cashlessness, because their chiefs escaped these deprivations and did not devise ways to help the community. SQ-3 said that they *“feast on the community”*. KI-43 said *“our leaders take all our good things”*, nothing trickles down to the poor (KI-21). KI-32 said: *“see what all of us look like in this community, do I look like a human being?”* KI-51 said that *“I feel people are laughing at me because of my condition [poverty]. My financial condition is taking life from me, it is the cause of all my problems, if I had money the community will respect me”*. KI-57 said that *“our leaders collect money from Shell and nothing gets to us”*. Chiefs actually impeded developers *“because they always demand for money from them, now...see all the uncompleted projects around us”* (SQ-7).

5.2 Causes of structural violence in local communities

Respondents who were members of the elites were more likely than poorer respondents to identify exogenous causes for the structural violence in their communities. For example, many SQ respondents blamed Shell for causing discord: *“Shell takes delight in divide and rule game...that is the main problem”* (SQ-1). Eleven KIs also referred to Shell’s divide-and-rule tactics in their communities. For example, KI-26 reported that:

‘Shell always use divide and rule tactics for us...most of their projects don’t favour the whole community and when our youths rise to say ‘No’ to this, they [Shell] call

some youth leaders and elders including our chief. Shell gives them some money and then mobilise them against other youths, they also use money to settle our chiefs and elders, this brings in problems in the community and it is the main cause of our problems”

Sixteen KIs (mostly community chiefs and leaders of indigenous CBOs) traced the major causes of structural violence in their communities directly to Shell. Other respondents blamed both Shell and the Nigerian government. For example, SQs made little distinction between the two exogenous sources: SQ-1 asserted that “*Shell and our president [Nigeria] are one body*”). Eleven 11 KIs saw the Nigerian government as the primary cause, using Shell to control local communities. For example, KI-32 said that “*they [government] link us to our enemy [Shell]...they use our leaders [chiefs] to achieve their evil intentions*”. This conspiracy of corruption explained why “*the state does not monitor our leaders [chief]...nobody questions them*” (KI-22). The 189 survey questionnaires revealed that there was no significant difference in respondents’ perceptions about the causes of structural violence between oil-rich and oil-poor communities, since 90% of the participants in all communities traced the root cause of structural violence in their communities to Shell and the Nigerian government (See Table 1).

Table: 1 shows the perceptions of SQs participants across communities on the causes of structural violence

Community	Endogenous causes (%)	Exogenous causes (%)	Total number of participants
oil rich	2.65	13.76	31
oil poor	2.12	11.11	25
oil poor	1.06	12.17	25
oil poor	1.06	13.23	27
oil rich	0.00	11.11	21
oil rich	0.00	7.94	15
oil rich	0.00	12.17	23
oil rich	0.53	11.11	22

Poorer respondents were more likely than elites to perceive the root source of structural violence in their communities to lie in endogenous causes. For example, 33 poor KIs traced the cause of structural violence directly to the customs and indigenous institutions controlled by their community chiefs. For some of these poor KIs, their customs and indigenous institutions exacerbated Shell’s dismal performance in their communities. For others, the indigenous causes were primary and the exogenous causes were secondary. For example, KI-63 claimed that “*all our problems are caused by our leaders because cheating from the top [Shell] is not possible without them*” [chiefs].

Other respondents traced the source of structural violence in their communities to both endogenous and exogenous causes. For example, KI-25 attributed structural violence in his community to both the sacredness traditionally accorded to chieftaincy stools and Shell's actions:

"The problem we have here is from inside and outside. We do not have a functioning health centre in my community because of our chief and youth leader. It is so because of the mere fact that the contractor handling the project has not gotten money to pay our youth president and our chief the money he owed them for the supply of sand and cement. You cannot imagine the little amount that they [chief and youth leader] are owed and the number of deaths that this has caused. I had no choice than to write a petition against our chief. The commissioner of police invited him and after interrogation, the police asked us to settle it ourselves since it is more like a family or kingship matter. Today we do not have a health centre in my community, my people travel very far to get treatments. Shell itself is just a selfish organization, whatever they do is for their own self-interest...they take from us and have given nothing in return other than pains...see our environment is destroyed"

On ways of dealing with exogenous causes of structural violence, respondents mostly held that the likely solution to their problems lay either in a complete disconnect of their communities from Shell or a change of operational strategy by Shell. About 20% of SQs wanted Shell to desist from sowing seeds of discord in their communities. Many participants (33 KIs and 14 SQs) agreed that economic and infrastructural development from Shell could help reduce the visible forms of structural violence which they experienced in their communities. SQ-149 said their communities and livelihoods would be equitable again if Shell were to improve their sources of livelihood and provide infrastructure in their communities, but it would not do this: *"our crisis is because of the lack of electricity, water and good roads...Shell can afford to do them for us. But because they are troublemakers, they will not want us to enjoy"*.

On ways of dealing with endogenous causes of structural violence, 27 KI, 11 SQ and 3 FGD respondents suggested a review of the Ogoni culture in which indigenous institutions served as a source of collective identity and indigenous undemocratic leaders governed autocratically, siphoning off funds meant for community development - all of which served to legalize violence against the population (Galtung, 1990). Most of these respondents endorsed the notion of the decentralization of community power: *"these people have so much power; we need to work against that"* (KI-16). According to KI-65, this meant embracing democracy where members were free to vote for leaders of their choice. Through these processes (decentralization and democracy), the community governance structure would be sanitized since it would *"remove all our leaders because they are not helping us, there are good people that can represent us very well"* (KI-53). Okeke-Ogbuafor et al (2016a) noted that this proposal was not as utopian as it might seem, since there had already been some tentative steps in this direction in some Ogoni communities. For example, the so-called 'rotating', 'parallel', and 'complementary' systems of governance were modest attempts by community

elites to dilute the traditional inherited system of leadership. The 'rotating' system was the first attempt made in some oil-rich communities to replace incumbent chiefs; the 'parallel' system involved the existence of a long-lasting opposition to the incumbent local chief; and the 'complementary' system was a more collective and cordial relationship between community elites and local chiefs.

6. Conclusion

From the above account of the perceptions of Ogonis in oil-rich and oil-poor communities about the causes of structural violence in their communities, six conclusions have emerged. Structural violence does occur in Ogoni communities; it takes both visible and invisible forms; most community chiefs and elites blame exogenous factors for it, whereas most poor people blame endogenous factors; structural violence cannot be blamed on a single source because in practice exogenous and endogenous causes often works alongside and reinforce each other; there is no significant difference between the nature of structural violence experienced by dwellers in oil-poor communities and those in oil-rich communities; and ways must be found to eliminate structural violence by reducing social, political and economic inequality, which lies at its heart.

Because this is the first study that looks at the perceptions of the Ogonis about the causes of structural violence in their oil-rich and oil-poor communities, this article recommends more research into this subject. Part of such research could involve attempts at quantifying structural violence in Ogoni communities or other parts of Nigeria and also looking at the implications for development.

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